**pentecost 16- september 12, 2021**

**zion, philipsburg**

Welcome to worship on this 16th Sunday of Pentecost, September 12, 2021.

I ask that you keep the family of Paul Wegford in your prayers this week. Paul passed away last Sunday at Grand River Hospital. The funeral was held at Zion on Wednesday September 8. Paul’s presence will be deeply missed by his family, friends and in our congregation.

I made a mistake on the calendar in September’s Messenger. We will not be celebrating communion today. We will do so next week September 19, 2021

The sermon today is the last in the 2021 Summer sermon series. Today we will listen to the words of our National Bishop Susan Johnson.

Our bidding prayers in place of the prayers of intercession were written by members of the NVMA Leadership team and congregations of the NVMA.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**GREETING (ELW p. 213)**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY (ELW p. 215)**

Let us pray.

O God, through suffering and rejection you bring forth our salvation, and by the glory of the cross you transform our lives. Grant that for the sake of the gospel we may turn from the lure of evil, take up our cross, and follow your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG*Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise* (ELW 834)**

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise!  
  
2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;  
thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.  
  
3 To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;  
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-9a**

A reading from Isaiah.

4The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my earto listen as those who are taught.5The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. 7The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;  
8he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9aIt is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Psalm 116:1-9**

1I love the Lord, who has heard my voice, and listened to my supplication,  
 2for the Lord has given ear to me whenever I called.  
 3The cords of death entangled me; the anguish of the grave came upon me;  
  I came to grief and sorrow.  
 4Then I called upon the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray you, save my life.”   
 5Gracious is the Lord and righteous; our God is full of compassion.  
 6The Lord watches over the innocent; I was brought low, and God saved me.  
 7Turn again to your rest, O my soul. for the Lord has dealt well with you.  
 8For you have rescued my life from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling;  
 9I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living.

**SECOND READING: James 3:1-12**

A reading from James.

1Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. 3If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. 4Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.  
  How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! 6And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, 8but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. 11Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? 12Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL: Mark 8:27-38**

The holy gospel according to Mark.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

27Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” 28And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” 29He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” 30And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.  
 31Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”  
  34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**SERMON (ELW p. 217)- National Bishop Susan Johnson**

Grace to you and peace in the name of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

And greetings to you from your siblings in Christ from coast to coast to coast that make up this family of God that we call the ELCIC.

I have often struggled with this text and let me share a little bit with you why. It’s really verses 34 and 35:

8:34-He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

8:35-For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

“Take up your cross.” It certainly doesn’t seem like a pleasure cruise, does it? Maybe I’m a little chicken sometimes, but I don’t really think that’s what bothers me about this text. I think what bothers me is the way sometimes that it’s been misused.

One way that it’s been misused is some people think that this call to take up your cross is a call to martyrdom. A call to die as part of your faith. And I believe very strongly that is not the case.

We do lift up and honour those who have been martyred for their faith because of the example of their discipleships and their commitment to live a life following Jesus. But we never celebrate their deaths. We mourn their deaths because of the oppressive systems that they lived that caused their persecution and death.

We also recommit ourselves to work to end oppression and injustice in our world in response to the example of the martyrs.

This gospel also gets misused by those who would preach a gospel of prosperity, because they define taking up your cross in a very specific way, namely to live a very pure and moral life, that in return you’ll be rewarded with riches here on earth as well as in heaven. If you colour within all the lines, where you will be rewarded with wealth, and health, a good job, a great family, promotions and who knows what else. And that’s not right. That’s not what the gospel promises us. In fact, I think it’s heretical.

Another way it gets twisted is by trying to use what sounds like a hard road to water down what the expectations of Christianity are, to some kind of “Christianity lite.” And that is certainly not what God is calling us to.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a martyr in the faith, has written about this in his book “The Cost of Discipleship,” and I just want to read one very brief passage:

“If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplift, which makes no costly demands, and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life. We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering.”

And indeed, that is very much what Jesus experienced.

I think the call to take up our cross and follow Jesus is a call to discipleship –and I think it means living life through the filter of loving God and loving one's neighbour.

I think this is what we are called to do in all aspects of our life. In our work, in our volunteer time, in our church community and our wider community, in how we care for the Earth and how we spend our money, and how we choose to use our time and the choices we make about purchasing or not purchasing...all of these things, everything that we do in our life, needs to come through the lens of that filter.

Jesus gave us many examples of people who lived costly lives of discipleship.

For example, the story of the widow who went into the temple and gave her all, her one mite-a very small coin, but all she had -for praise and honour and love of God.

Or the story of the woman who lost one coin, searched and searched, and upon finding it was so happy that she threw a party for all her neighbours to celebrate with her. In trying to save that one coin, she spent a whole bunch of money on throwing a party. It’s a sign of our call to seek for those that are lost, in terms of their physical and emotional and spiritual needs, but also to be lavish in our hospitality.

Or the wonderful story about the father who receives the return of his son who has gone rogue, or prodigal, and welcomes him with wide open loving arms, and forgiveness and hospitality and

generosity. Who places a robe upon him, a ring on his finger, and throws him a party and promises him more because he is so happy his son is alive and back with him. The son wasn’t entitled to that, he’d already received half of his father’s estate -what was owed to him -but this is the sign of God’s working and God’s ways -the cost of discipleship.

Or the story of the Samaritan man who found the Jewish man beaten up on the side of the road, attended to his needs and took him farther to a place where he would be taken care of, and paid for that care.

It’s going that extra mile, in all that we do in life. I’m not saying the life of discipleship is easy -it’s challenging, and it’s a muscle that we need to exercise and grow into.

That’s why we’re doing this four-year emphasis on Living our Faith. We’ve spent three years really focusing on strengthening our relationship with God, because that is what is going to help us get to year four.

In year one we looked at prayer, and year two we looked at reading scripture, and right now we’re starting a year of focusing on our devotional life and our worship life, but in year four, a year from now, we’ll be looking at how we live out love in action, in all aspects of our lives.

Taking up your cross is not always easy. It sometimes means being willing to take a stand that is not popular and receiving criticism for it. It’s being willing to stand up for a classmate who’s being bullied in school, or to speak for the co-worker who’s being harassed or subjected to micro-aggressions because of gender, or gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation, or race, or differing abilities. It’s being willing to make costly decisions to give something to that person who’s going by your car yet one more time with a hat out, to volunteering at a food bank, or saying maybe we don’t need a new car this year and let’s use the money that we would have spent in terms of helping with this or that.

Or it means carefully thinking about your values and what’s important in your life as you prepare to vote in this upcoming federal election.

It’s about how we live all aspects of our life together, and there are consequences to those actions.

I read a tweet by someone named Carlos A. Rodríguez. I’ve never seen one of his tweets before but this really struck me. He said:

There are no conditions on “Love Thy Neighbour.”

There are no addendums to “Welcome The Stranger.”

There are zero amendments to “The Golden Rule.”

And if we’re wrong, let’s err on the side of inclusion and love.

Always, love.

The reality is that we are marked out for this life of discipleship, this life of taking up our cross to follow Jesus in our baptisms, right at the start of our life of faith. We are splashed with water

three times in the name of the trinity. We are then signed with the mark of the cross of Christ on our foreheads, and then anointed and sealed with the holy spirit. But that marking with the cross means something. It’s right here on our foreheads. It’s where we lead from, where we walk out from, and we don’t always remember it; we don’t see it when we look in the mirror, but maybe we should. It’s what we are called to do, what we are called to be -disciples.

The good news is, first of all, we are not alone in this. We know and we are promised that God is with us always, in our joys and in our sorrows, at times when carrying that cross gets very difficult. We know that we have been called into a community, the faith community that surrounds us, to help us discern where and how Christ is calling us, both individually and then together, but also to help us when things get difficult, to bear the burdens and to continue to follow Jesus.

So that means the world to me. And I hope it means the world to you too.

At the beginning of this lesson when Peter becomes the hero and says ‘you are the Messiah’, and in other places along with that Jesus said ‘yes, you’re faithful and on you I will build my church’, the reality is that just a few minutes later, here’s Peter rebuking Jesus for prophesying about his death and suffering and resurrection. And Peter, we know, goes on when Jesus was arrested to deny him three times. But Peter still is the foundation on which Christ builds his church. Christ knows that even though we are called to take up our cross and follow Jesus, we will inevitably stumble. And the thing is, we are in a covenant relationship with God which will not change when we stumble, or when we falter, or when we get scared or when it's too hard, or anything.

God loves us unconditionally and promises us life abundant, now and into the future. And again, that promise that we will never be alone, that God’s presence is always with us, surrounding us and supporting us.

So let’s take courage from these things and let's strike out again in terms of taking up our cross and following Jesus.

You know, this really isn’t such a scary passage after all.

God bless you in your journey of discipleship. Amen

**HYMN OF THE DAY*Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said* (ELW 667)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjAPJI1_fFc>

1 "Take up your cross," the Savior said,  
"if you would my disciple be;  
forsake the past, and come this day,  
and humbly follow after me."  
  
2 Take up your cross; let not its weight  
pervade your soul with vain alarm;  
his strength shall bear your spirit up,  
sustain your heart, and nerve your arm.  
  
3 Take up your cross, nor heed the shame,  
nor let your foolish heart rebel;  
for you the Lord endured the cross  
to save your soul from death and hell.

**Prayers for Restoration and Return: Nith Valley Ministry Area**

Gracious God of promise and deliverance, of old you have declared your ability and intention to turn sand into water, mountains into plains and make deserts break forth in blooms of delight. We turn to you once again, in our dark time of isolation. We trust you will guide us in restoring all communities of faith to old and new patterns of joy and hope. And we look forward to all parts of Christ’s body, your church, returning to wholeness and growing in health.

We call on you not only to bless once more the front doors that lead to worship but all the doors of your church: the doors to the work shed, the doors to the kitchen, the doors to our meeting rooms, the doors to the choir closet, to the library, to the Sunday school supply cupboards, to the pastor’s study, and to the front doors that open both ways, to welcome in and to send forth into the community.

Let us pray for those who gather together. *Time for silent prayer.*

Relational God, you have promised that where two or three are gathered, there you will be also. As communities return to in-person gatherings, we remember that our communities have grown beyond the walls of our churches. Continue to gather us in new ways which will extend your community throughout the world. Wed ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for our shared life of worship. *Time for silent prayer.*

Gracious and loving God, our faith has been tested during the past year. We have learned how to look at worshiping together in new ways - by being outdoors, online and even alone in our homes. We have been separated from each other and our church buildings, and yet we continue to be strong in our willingness to worship you as we are and wherever we are. We grieve not being together in church, in order to keep each other safe and healthy. We continue to have hope. It is not a building that sustains us but your mercy and love that keeps us together always. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for the faithful departed and for all the saints who from their labours rest. *Time for silent prayer.*

Almighty and eternal God, you have called people throughout the generations through Holy Baptism into your Church, and you have continued to inspire generations of these saints to witness and serve in your holy name. As we gather as the communion of saints, we give thanks for the life of Paul Wegford and all the saints who have gone before us, all who have inspired and guided us, all who have laid the foundation upon which we build our congregations to the glory of God. May the lives of your holy ones continue to inspire us as we look toward that day when you will gather us into our eternal home where nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for our continuing witness. *Time for silent prayer.*

Gifting God, your Holy Spirit equips us with a rich variety of gifts, some we may not even realize. Give your church the confidence needed to step out of our comfort zones to eagerly do your will. Grant that we would use the gifts you have given us to bear witness to Christ in lives built on faith and unconditional love. Help us to look to you for signs of guidance and enliven us to listen to your call to help those in need, so that we may be the hands and feet of Jesus and share the good news of your love and mercy. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for those who serve the community. *Time for silent prayer.*

Shepherding God, you have bestowed upon us unique gifts to extend out into our communities: to walk with the lost, to bind up the afflicted, to sing songs of hope, to stand with the unseen. Help us to never grow weary in service to others and give us the fire of your spirit to see and serve you in our midst. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for those who serve our faith communities in caring for the physical spaces in which we gather as God’s people. *Time for silent prayer.*

Almighty and eternal God, you have called us together as your holy people, who gather around Word and Sacrament to worship and praise you. We give thanks for the buildings in which our congregations gather and engage in ministry, for our fore bears who gave of themselves in the construction of these edifices, and for those who clean and maintain them so that they can continue to serve as places where your Word is proclaimed, where people are fed and nourished, and where your love abides among your people. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for all the people who have been visiting, and taking care of members, neighbours, and people in our communities. *Time for silent prayer.*

Thank you, God, for the many who have provided grocery pickups, medication deliveries, baked casseroles and visited on the front porch with our friends and neighbours who have been isolated throughout Covid 19. Thank you for the phone calls that keep us connected. May all who are feeling lonely and isolated be known and shared in our concern for each other. We thank you for the many who generously share themselves and for the ability you give us everyday to be your hands, and the humanity of this world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for God’s children, young and old, who are growing and learning in this season of change. *Time for silent prayer.*

As we begin another school year, we ask you, God, to lift up the students, teachers and staff. We pray for their health and safety as they return to classrooms both in person and online. We hope to have a more continual path forward and trust you will lead us according to your will. We praise you, Father, for the wonderful opportunity of education. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for opportunities to share table fellowship and the fruits of God’s creation with all people. *Time for silent prayer.*

Almighty and eternal God, you have bestowed upon us the wonderful world in which we live and provide us with all that we need for daily living out of your loving goodness and mercy. We give thanks for the food that nourishes us, and for opportunities to share meals and fellowship with others. We give thanks that you have entrusted us as stewards of your creation, and we pray that we might find new opportunities to shared the abundance that you desire all people to share with those in our communities, nation, and world, that we may be fed with the bounty of creation as we look forward to that day when we will gather at your table in our eternal home. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for all young people. *Time for silent prayer.*

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of youth and the blessing of their presence among us. We understand this pandemic has taken a unique toll on them. As we begin to return to normal aspects of our lives, many of our youth are facing big changes and grieving the loss of key milestones in their lives. Please be with them and support them as they carry the heaviness of missed graduations, celebrations, friendships, extra-curriculars, sports, and changes in schools. We ask that you hold them in your arms, hear their most inner thoughts and the struggles they are facing. Please grant them comfort and strength as they meet the uncertainty and unknowns of a new school year. Be with them as they return to seeing old friends, and new peers they have only met through screens. Uphold and give them peace, as only you can. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for the time we spend together in worship. *Time for silent prayer.*

God of our rituals, we sing together, we pray together, we eat bread and drink wine together, all to honour and glorify you. We long for the day we can sing and praise uninhibited by masks and fear of virus. How many times do you remind us – do not fear, yet we still have fear. Help love abound in our worship and free us to come together in our liturgy to commune in community, to share love, grace and connection to each other and to you, our God.

Indwelling God, be with us and in us and around us, as you have promised and as we trust. Help us to know that all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things shall be well. Amen.

**PEACE (ELW p. 217)**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**OFFERING PRAYER**

God of abundance,

you cause streams to break forth in the desert

and manna to rain from the heavens.

Accept the gifts you have first given us.

Unite them with the offering of our lives

to nourish the world you love so dearly;

through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD (ELW p. 220)**

Let us pray.

Holy God, mighty Fortress, loving Redeemer, steadfast Comforter, as vegetation matures in forests and fields, your living Word undergirds all that lives.

We praise your eternal Word.

**We praise your eternal Word.**

In the words of the scriptures you offer us Christ: our refuge, our savior, our friend,

accompanying us throughout our years and renewing us in love.

We praise Jesus, your Word.

**We praise Jesus, your Word.**

We pray for power from your abiding Spirit. Strengthen us to stand firm in faith,

in devotion to your Word, and in service to others.

We pray for the Spirit of your Word.

**We pray for the Spirit of your Word.**

 To you be honor and praise and glory, today and forever. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER (ELW p. 221)**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,** **hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,** **thy will be done,** **on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;** **and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those** **who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,** **but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,** **and the power, and the glory,** **forever and ever. Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING (ELW p. 221)**

People of God, you are Christ’s body, bringing new life to a suffering world.

The holy Trinity, + one God, bless you now and forever. **Amen**

**SENDING SONG*Great Is Thy Faithfulness* (ELW 733)**

1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not;  
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.  
  
Refrain  
Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;  
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!  
  
2 Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. Refrain  
  
3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Refrain

**DISMISSAL (ELW p. 222)**

Go in peace. The living Word dwells in you.

**Thanks be to God.**

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